



## Public Service Commission

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Rory M. Christian, Chair

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### **Utilities Prepared to Meet Consumer Demand for Electricity and Natural Gas During Winter**

**State Utility Regulator Will Ensure Appropriate Customer Winter Outreach Occurs, Including  
Information on Available Home Heating Assistance to New Yorkers in Need**

**PSC Will Closely Monitor Natural Gas Supply Throughout the Winter Heating Season**

**Electricity and Natural Gas Bills for Winter Expected to be Similar to Last Winter**

**ALBANY** — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today announced that it expects the State's utilities will have adequate supplies of natural gas and electricity on hand to meet the demands of residential and commercial customers in New York State. Meanwhile, due to a softening in global commodity costs of natural gas, heating oil, and propane prices are expected to be lower this winter, a welcome relief for residential and commercial energy customers.

"We will continue to closely monitor the utilities serving New York State to make sure they have adequate sources and supplies of electricity and natural gas to meet expected customer demands this winter," **said Commission Chair Rory M. Christian.** "The utilities have hedged approximately 70 percent of their estimated statewide full service electric residential energy needs to mitigate any electric market price swings this winter."

**Customer Outreach:** The Department of Public Service has a proactive program in place to help customers receive the information and assistance they need. The outreach and education efforts include publications in multiple languages about billing and payment options, financial assistance programs and winter preparedness measures to help with winter bills, and the steps to take if customers are faced with heating-related energy emergencies.

**Electric and Natural Gas Price Forecast:** This winter's gas bills are expected to be lower than last year due to lower gas commodity prices. Electric supply bills are expected to be slightly higher than last year due to increased capacity costs. On average, a residential electric customer using 600 kWh per month is expected to pay about \$62 per month for supply this winter, up 3 percent from the same period a year ago, but the actual amount varies by utility. Meanwhile, the average residential customer using 708 therms of natural gas can expect to pay an estimated \$193 per month during the winter heating season (November through March), down 4 percent from the same period a year ago, but note that the actual amount will vary widely by region due to the weather and usage. A colder-than-normal winter will cause usage and bills to increase. Note that the State's investor-owned utilities take steps to reduce the volatility of electric and gas supply prices to their full-service

residential customers. Between financial hedges and gas held in storage, gas utilities have hedged approximately 50 percent of their estimated statewide customer needs. However, customers are not completely shielded from global market price volatility.

**Winter-Heating Preparedness:** Staff continues to track weather impacts, pipeline and storage assets, and interruptible customer compliance, and will also work with the local distribution companies (LDCs) and communities to find innovative solutions that increase environmental benefits, while meeting customer expectations for their energy demands. This work includes the aggressive pursuit of efficiency measures, demand response and other solutions to meet growing space and water heating needs. The LDCs serving New York State are finalizing contracting for adequate natural gas supply, delivery capacity and storage inventory to satisfy firm customer demands under peak winter conditions. The Department will also continue to closely monitor areas of the State where demand is growing at a faster pace. The ongoing gas planning proceeding will modernize the long-term planning process used by the gas utilities and require them to file long-term plans that include energy efficiency, demand response programs and other programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the State's natural gas system and implement uniform moratoria procedures. The new planning processes will also allow for extensive stakeholder input. Department staff continues to coordinate with oil industry representatives and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to ensure that customers have access to adequate supplies of winter heating fuels. In keeping with the Commission's reliability requirements, natural gas companies are auditing systems, processes, and procedures, as well as scheduling tests to ensure that interruptible customers comply with the Commission's alternate fuel requirements.

**Electric-System Preparedness:** There is sufficient capability to meet electric demand for the winter. As part of the winter assessment, the major electric-generating facility owners in Southeast New York, which own about 12,000 MW of dual fuel generation capability, were contacted. Staff found that these owners are continuing to implement lessons learned from the Polar Vortex winter of 2013-2014, including having increased pre-winter on-site fuel reserves, having firm contracts with fuel oil suppliers, conducting more aggressive replenishment plans, and having more proactive pre-winter maintenance and facilities preparations.

**Home Heating Assistance:** New Yorkers can take advantage of cost-efficient programs in anticipation of the winter to adopt energy efficiency and electrification solutions for homes and businesses. During the winter months, New Yorkers can take the following steps to mitigate energy costs:

- **Apply for HEAP.** Beginning November 1, applications will be accepted for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) which can provide up to \$976 to eligible homeowners and renters depending on income, household size and how they heat their home. To qualify for heating assistance from HEAP, a family of four must have a maximum gross monthly income of \$5,838, or an annual gross income of \$70,056. Help is also now available to assist eligible homeowners if their primary heating equipment is unsafe or not operating and their furnace or boiler must be repaired or replaced. Benefit amounts through the HEAP Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement program are based on the actual cost incurred to repair or replace the essential heating equipment — up to \$4,000 for a repair and \$8,000 for a replacement. Eligible homeowners can also now apply for a HEAP heating equipment clean and tune benefit to keep their home's primary heating source working at peak efficiency, up to a maximum of \$500. Applicants for these benefits should contact their local Department of Social Services for more information.

- **Take immediate action to be more energy efficient.** NYSERDA offers energy saving tips for residents and homeowners, as well as businesses that can lower energy usage. NYSERDA also offers a range of home energy efficiency programs that can help save energy and reduce costs over time. Income-eligible customers may qualify for reduced cost or free energy upgrades to their homes through EmPower New York and Assisted Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® programs. Homeowners should also check with their local gas and electric utility companies to access discounted products and services that can help them lower their energy costs all year long.
- **Receive a customized list of energy-related assistance in the State.** New York Energy Advisor can help income-eligible New Yorkers locate programs that help them spend less on energy and create healthier and more comfortable spaces. With the New York Energy Advisor, consumers answer simple questions and get connected with energy-saving offers in New York State. Sponsored by NYSERDA and utilities, qualified New Yorkers can get help paying utility bills, receive special offers on heating assistance, and more.
- **Sign up for Community Solar.** Community Solar allows New Yorkers, including renters, co-op and condo owners, and businesses to save money every month on their electric bills. Consumers can subscribe to a Community Solar project where available and start receiving credits on their electric bill for the clean energy produced by a solar farm.
- **Get a free energy audit.** Homeowners across New York are eligible for a free home energy assessment through NYSERDA's Residential Energy Audit Program. Home energy assessments are available both in-person and using remote technologies. Trained and qualified contractors who provide energy assessment services can help homeowners decide which energy improvements are worth investing in, install the improvements, and assist in connecting homeowners with NYSERDA's low-interest financing programs.
- **Reduce your business or building's energy costs.** Community Energy Advisors across New York State can help residents, businesses, and multifamily building owners reduce their energy use and costs.
- **Join a Clean Heating and Cooling Campaign.** Participating in a campaign eases the process of replacing a community member's current heating or cooling system with clean heating or cooling technology by connecting members with pre-qualified contractors and outlining potential incentives, tax breaks, financing, and payment options. Experienced contractors can give a home or business owner a holistic assessment to determine if their home or business space will also benefit from weatherproofing upgrades that can further increase comfort and reduce energy bills.
- **Know your rights and protections.** The New York State Home Energy Fair Practices Act has comprehensive protections for residential customers regarding their utility services. These rights include the option to pay bills in installments, a cap on late fees, sufficient notice prior to shut-off of services, and protections for those on a fixed income or with medical conditions.
- **Consider bill payment options.** When getting in touch with your utility provider, inquire about billing options that allow for deferred payments or "budget billing" options that balance out bills that are higher in one season and lower in another. This can structure your payments and make it easier to navigate costs.
- **Better understand the energy management of your building.** Put Energy to Work provides a deeper understanding of tools and programs for businesses that help in energy management for commercial and industrial buildings and includes resources that can increase profitability, create a competitive advantage, and achieve greater resiliency.

Today's report may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at [www.dps.ny.gov](http://www.dps.ny.gov) and entering Case Number 23-M-0230 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission documents may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.